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SportDiver



THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE PADI DIVING SOCIETY



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THE WINTER BLUES

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CAMERA

A smiling woman is standing on the deck of a boat, leaning on the metal railings. She is wearing a white and red PADI baseball cap, sunglasses, a white and red PADI long-sleeved shirt with a globe logo, and black PADI sweatpants. The background shows a marina with several white boats docked in clear blue water under a bright sky.

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☒ Dive Gear

☒ PADI Gear

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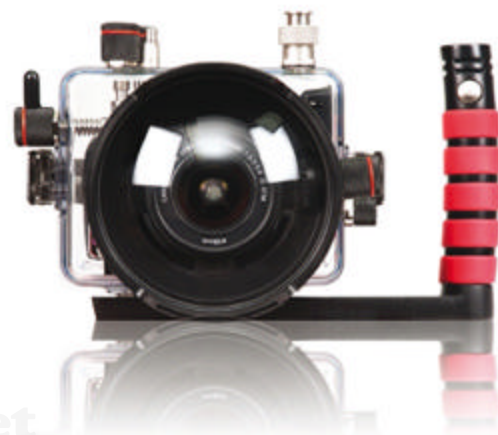
Elena Kalis Bahamas

"Original underwater photography is hard to come by, but Elena Kalis encapsulates whimsical emotion in every frame. Combining extraordinary styling with striking portraits, she makes you think 'I wish I'd thought of that', and despite the way water warps colour, works exceptionally with the palettes of scenes and subjects. Elena excels in a specialism which is particularly difficult to master to such an extent and is an artist in her own right."

- Lorna Dockerill, editor (Professional Photographer Magazine UK)



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A green turtle
cruises Thailand's
Andaman Sea.
Photo by
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An Underwater Amazon

Komodo is where currents collide, stirring up myriad wildlife. These stunning images take a look at the heart of the Coral Triangle.

BY GREGORY LECOEUR

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World's Best ... Places to Bring a Camera
Find iconic locales for your inner shutterbug.
By Brooke Morton



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SPRING FLINGS

We went to press on this issue of *Sport Diver* in late January, when many of you were wearing snow parkas and shoveling snow. Central Florida winters don't usually include named blizzards, but as we were choosing photos for our spring-break feature, it happened to be a rain-chilled dreary day where *Sport Diver* has its home office, in Winter Park, Florida. It was a good day to Google "tips on beating the winter blues," where I found tips such as "light a fire, choose a Netflix movie and cuddle on the couch to watch it." Good tips, but divers are a bit more adventuresome. When the weather outside is frightful, we dream about diving in tropical, warm waters under blue, sunny skies. We've found nine destinations that are sure to help you shake the winter blahs. They are the perfect spring-break getaways, from high-octane-fun to kick-off-your-flip-flops vacations. Turn to page 36, and get the party started.

Patricia Wuest
Editor-in-Chief



I just wanted to let you know that my son Jonathan and I took our trip to Fiji in December, and it was wonderful! It was a really special trip that could never have happened without winning the [*Sport Diver*] Facebook contest. We spent three days on Kioa Island in Fiji, where my son Tim is stationed in the Peace Corps. Then we went diving in Taveuni for three days. The boys did the Beqa shark dive in Pacific Harbor, and then we all went to Volivoli Beach Resort on Viti Levu for Christmas. Everyone was wonderful, and the trip went without a hitch. Your readers should know that the diving in Fiji is absolutely amazing! We made memories that will last forever. I am extremely grateful.

— **Aimee McMaster**, Queensbury, NY

Aimee, we're so glad you enjoyed your stay at Volivoli Beach Resort, as the winner of our 2014 Fiji Dive Vacation Contest. Look for other dive-travel and gear contests on our Facebook page (SportDiverMag).

EMAIL THE EDITOR at editor@sportdiver.com.

TRIBE PRIZE

Vivid-Pix Picture Fix Email us about anything related to this issue, and if we publish your letter, you could win a free software download (a \$49.99 value) of Vivid-Pix (vivid-pix.com), which allows you to easily turn blah shots into great ones with a simple click of a button. Available for Mac or PC.



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EDITORIAL

Patricia Wuest EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Mary Frances Emmons DEPUTY EDITOR
Tara Bradley SENIOR EDITOR
Rebecca Strauss MANAGING EDITOR
Roger Roy GEAR EDITOR
Cindy Martin COPY EDITOR
Marina Guerres, Nada Hassanein, Gabbie Mont, Rachel Stuart INTERNS

ART

Elizabeth Fleener ART DIRECTOR
Chelsea Pomaes PHOTO DIRECTOR

CONTRIBUTORS

Ashley Annin, Anna DeLoach, Ned DeLoach, David Espinosa, Caroline Glenn, Gregory Lecoeur, Eric Michael, Brooke Morton, Alex Mustard, Karl Shreeves, Richard Smith

DIGITAL

Steve Spears DIGITAL CONTENT DIRECTOR
Martin Kuss SENIOR DIGITAL PRODUCER
Becca Hurley DIGITAL PRODUCER
Alex Bean DIGITAL EDITOR

SALES

Laura Walker GROUP PUBLISHER
laura.walker@bonniercorp.com
David Benz ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
david.benz@bonniercorp.com
Linda Sue Dingel TERRITORY MANAGER
407-913-4945; lindasue.dingel@bonniercorp.com
Jeff Mondle TERRITORY MANAGER
760-419-5898; jeff.mondle@bonniercorp.com
Jonathan Seviya ACCOUNT ASSOCIATE
407-571-4575; jonathan.seviya@bonniercorp.com
Tracey Voorhees ADVERTISING SALES COORDINATOR
407-571-4986; tracey.voorhees@bonniercorp.com

PADI DIVING SOCIETY

Theresa Kaplan PADI DIVING SOCIETY DIRECTOR
949-858-7234, ext. 2322; theresa.kaplan@padi.com
Adrianne Miller PADI DIVING SOCIETY MARKETING CONSULTANT
949-858-7234, ext. 2513; adrianne.miller@padi.com

Matt Hickman VICE PRESIDENT, DIRECTOR OF BRAND STRATEGIES
Shawn Bean EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
Dave Weaver CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Leigh Bingham CONSUMER MARKETING DIRECTOR
Haley Bischof GROUP MARKETING DIRECTOR
Oriana Avila MARKETING MANAGER, DIVE AND TRAVEL GROUP
Robyn Sheckler PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGER
Lindsay Gigger CONTENT SOLUTIONS MANAGER
Jeff Cassell CORPORATE PRODUCTION DIRECTOR
Michelle Doster GROUP PRODUCTION DIRECTOR
Kelly Kramer Weekley SENIOR PRODUCTION MANAGER
Suzanne Oberholtzer DESIGN SERVICES DIRECTOR
Julia Arana, Jennifer Remias GRAPHIC DESIGNERS
Sheri Bass HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR

BONNIER

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Dave Freygang CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
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David Ritchie CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER
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Jennifer Anderson VICE PRESIDENT, DIGITAL AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT
David Butler VICE PRESIDENT, DIGITAL OPERATIONS
Perri Dorset VICE PRESIDENT, PUBLIC RELATIONS
Jeremy Thompson GENERAL COUNSEL

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Dive Briefs



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SD
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**Wish You
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Whale Watching

The ocean's biggest fish returns to Isla Mujeres every year

Despite its name, the biggest fish in the ocean is also one of the gentlest. Whale sharks, which can grow to 40 feet or more, are filter feeders, and eat mostly microscopic plants and animals like plankton and small fish. The warm summer months in Isla Mujeres, Mexico, draw them in droves for a feast on seasonal spawning bonito (Atlantic tuna). No scuba is allowed during the aggregation, so you'll need only your snorkel, mask and fins for a front-row seat to this spectacle at the surface. — *Gabbie Mont*

WHEN TO GO:

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WHERE TO GO:

Pro Dive Mexico
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1 Cressi Frog Plus EBS When it's time to jump in the water with the world's biggest fish, you need a fin that's responsive to your kick, and a blade that won't strain your calves or ankles. You get that and more with the Frog Plus. cressiusa.com **2 Sherwood Scuba Vida** You'll also need a mask with an expansive view, and the Vida's teardrop lenses offer that. sherwoodscuba.com **3 Body Glove Sport Finish** accessorizing for the encounter of a lifetime with the Sport, which has an excellent purge valve. bodyglove.com

PERFECT 10

FOR MORE INFO ON ST. CROIX VISIT
SPORTDIVER.COM

ST. CROIX

From beer-guzzling pigs to healthy reefs and corals, here's why divers love this USVI paradise

BY REBECCA HURLEY

1 CORAL CONSERVATION

Just offshore from Cane Bay, make a stop at the coral nursery to see how the Cruzans are doing their part to make sure their reefs remain in great shape.

canebayscuba.com

2 SOUSED SOWS

Nestled away in the rainforest, the Mount Pellier Hut Domino Club features a friendly bar where visitors can take a tipple themselves, or share some nonalcoholic beers with the thirsty resident pigs.

3 WRECK HEAVEN

Is that grass or garden eels? See how many of these shy critters you can count while navigating the five shipwrecks found in shallow water in Butler Bay.

n2theblue.com

4 OPEN-AIR OASIS

Unique daily specials like lobster egg rolls served in an open-air setting make Savant the island's must-dine spot.

savantstcroix.com

5 BUILD YOUR OWN

Build your own burger and sip a frozen lime-and-coconut rum at eat @

cane bay, all while watching shore divers embark on their next dive.

eatatcanebay.com

6 TINY TREASURES

Keep your eyes peeled for seahorses, the ever-elusive octopus, and other macro delights on a night dive at Frederiksted Pier.

sweetbottomdive.com

7 CANE BAY WALL

Southern stingrays frequent this famed site. Watch your buoyancy — it's easy to get lost in the beauty of the seemingly never-ending drop-off.

stcroixscuba.com

8 SALT RIVER CANYON

Dive the island's oldest moored site on the island at Salt River Canyon. These walls are home to giant lobsters and hawksbill turtles.

divexp.com

9 BEACH ACCESS

Enjoy the glorious strand at Carambola Beach Resort, and then grab your gear to hit the house reef just offshore. Bonus: Conditions are perfect for your family's beginner divers.

10 CRUISIN' CRUZAN

The rum named for the island's natives is still produced on St. Croix today. Take a break from the sun and sand with a stop at the Cruzan rum distillery for a worthwhile tour — and a sample or two.

cruzanrum.com



STEVE SIMONSEN (2)

DIVERS GUIDE
TO ST. CROIX

» Average water temp 82°F (29°C) in summer; 80°F (26°C) in winter » What to wear 3 mm shorty or wetsuit » Average viz 60 to 100 feet » When to go Year-round » More info sportdiver.com/destinations/us-virgin-islands

NEW APP ROUNDUP

There are plentiful apps on the market for divers – find out which ones are worth downloading

BY CAROLINE GLENN

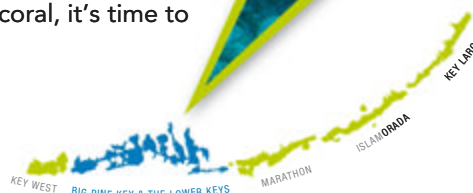
 Whaleguide Version: 1.6; \$8.99 iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch	 Dive Flag App Version: 2.5; Free iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch	 MarineDebris Tracker Version: 2.1; Free iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch	 Seafood Watch Version: 3.0.17; Free iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch
Video and photo collection of cetaceans all over the world	Includes reviews of dive shops, gear and instructors	Users can log trash they find on coastlines and waterways	Identifies sustainable and unsustainable seafood
PROS: Users can tell which species they'll see where	PROS: Provides a digital logbook and photography tips	PROS: GPS pinpoints exact location; able to include photos	PROS: Can find restaurants that are ocean friendly
CONS: Additional photos and video pack cost \$6.99 extra	CONS: Very difficult to create an account	CONS: Not able to view debris that other users log	CONS: The "edit account" button redirects to the Monterey Bay Aquarium website

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BigPineKey
and Florida's Lower Keys



THE GOLIATH GROUPE

These critically endangered giants have no place on the dinner plate

BY DR. RICHARD SMITH



The goliath, *Epinephelus itajara*, is the largest grouper in the western hemisphere, and can reach 8 feet in length and more than 1,000 pounds.



A 4.6-foot-long female caught at a spawning aggregation contained

57
million eggs.

For a few weeks each year, spawning aggregations of up to 100 goliath grouper occur at specific times and locations.

Individuals can travel 100 miles to spawn.

Small (under 4 feet, or five to six years old) goliath grouper live around mangroves; larger adults prefer coral reefs.



Forty percent of goliath grouper caught in Belize had mercury levels exceeding the U.S.-recommended levels for human consumption.

These adaptable fish can live in brackish water and tolerate low oxygen levels.

Goliath grouper can have a lifespan of up to

37
years.



A goliath grouper's age can be estimated using annual growth rings in its dorsal fin rays, much like those found within tree trunks.

Goliath grouper were removed from the NOAA Species of Concern list in 2006 but remain a "no take" species in the United States.

The World Conservation Union's Red List listed the species as critically endangered in 1994. Survival is threatened by overfishing and loss of the inshore mangrove habitat required by juveniles.

Despite having teeth, goliath grouper engulf and swallow prey whole.



MICHAEL PATRICK ONEILL (4); GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

FOLLOW RICHARD SMITH'S UNDERWATER ADVENTURES AT OCEANREALMIMAGES.COM

Get Caught Up in *The Current*

Film explores the healing powers of the ocean

BY ASHLEY ANNIN



Physical limitations are washed away in *The Current*, a documentary filled with inspirational messages that encourage both divers and nondivers to experience the benefits

of the ocean.

In one particularly powerful scene, "Soul Surfer" Bethany Hamilton — who lost her arm in a shark attack — is diving in Hawaii when a large reef shark glides past her. The professional surfer said the experience was incredible, and she didn't show an ounce of fear.

Minutes later, adventurer Grant Korgan is shown standing underwater, something he hasn't been able to do since he lost the use of his legs in a snowmobile accident.

The movie is the second adaptive sports film by the Make a Hero foundation, and follows the struggles and successes of seven disabled people

who find strength in diving. The cast ranges in diving experience, from deep-sea diving world-record holder Leo "The Lion" Morales, who lost his leg to cancer, to diving newbie Anthony Robles, who became an NCAA wrestling champ despite being born without legs.

Founder of the Make a Hero foundation Kurt Miller worked with PADI to certify the cast, and open-water dives took place in the Bahamas, Cozumel and Kauai. A diver himself, Miller said the film was a labor of love.

"Because of my love for the ocean and scuba diving, this film meant a lot to me," Miller said. "We're all disabled in one way or another — it could be financially; it could be

emotionally; it could be in a relationship. But these people had physical limitations, and what they went through I can't even imagine."

The film's premiere at the 2014 DEMA Show in Las Vegas represented a collaboration between Make a Hero and PADI. Available in English and Spanish, *The Current* is now available exclusively for screening in dive shops in an effort to inspire divers and nondivers across the county.

"We believe in the ocean, and we believe that people are great and can change their lives," Miller said.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on *The Current* and promotional materials for your dive shop, visit makeahero.org.

MAKEAHERO.ORG



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800-648-2441
hawaii-island@hvcb.org

ROBOTICS ROCK STAR

What majoring in ocean engineering looks like for Grace Young

BY BROOKE MORTON

Fabien Cousteau calls Grace Young, 22, a rock star. The ocean explorer first met the prodigy at a 2013 *Glamour* magazine luncheon where she was being honored as a College Woman of the Year. The MIT graduate and current Oxford University marine robotics Ph.D. candidate had already helped create a machine that generated 3-D maps of Antarctic ice formations, used to better predict weather and climate change. For NOAA, Young helped design a BotCam, aka robotic camera, to monitor no-fishing zones. Her packed resume — including being an accomplished diver — piqued the interest of Cousteau, who invited her to suit up for Mission 31, his 31-day experiment at the Aquarius habitat in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Q: What was your favorite innovation of Mission 31?

A: Another engineer built a brand-new, high-speed video camera capable of filming 18,000 frames a second. By comparison, your iPhone takes 30 frames a second, or 120 in the slo-mo setting. The previous version of this technology cost \$100,000. The new camera costs \$5,000, which is affordable to oceanic research. We were able to capture a mantis shrimp feeding on a goby, which happens in the blink of an eye.



“TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP US COLLECT DATA TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING, AND TURN THAT KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION TO CREATE POLICY.”

Q: What would readers find surprising about Mission 31?

A: Every night before going to bed, we planned each half-hour of the coming day in terms of what we wanted to accomplish. That facility costs \$10,000 a day to operate, so you can't waste any time.

Q: What's the biggest misconception about your work?

A: When I tell people what I do, they always think of humanoid robots, but then they see pictures. I make propulsion units, most of which are barrel-shaped. The other misconception is that people think robots will have all the fun for us, but I don't think so. There will always be a place for manned exploration.



Time for a quick cup of coffee on Mission 31

READ MORE

To learn more about Grace Young's work, visit graceunderthesea.com.

ASK DAN

How Is Anxiety Related to Dive Fitness?

BY DIVERS ALERT NETWORK

After experiencing personal and professional difficulties, Peter returned to diving to relieve stress. After completing a refresher course and several local dives, he decided to learn to wreck dive. During his first wreck dive, he became entangled in fishing line that he was unable to cut with his knife. As he struggled to free himself, he quickly panicked; watching the numbers on his gauge drop made him only more frantic. Luckily, his dive buddy was able to cut him free.

What Is Anxiety?

Mental preparation and clarity are important components of dive fitness. Underwater, a diver must be able to cope with stress to safely complete a dive. Anxiety, manifested as an overwhelming sense of apprehension or fearfulness, can produce psychological and physical symptoms, which can include clouded decision-making, jitters, paranoia, the inability to focus, and irrational behavior.

Two Plus Two Doesn't Always Equal Four

Anxiety can also compound, which means that prior stress can heighten current levels of stress — making any given situation more dangerous. During Peter's incident, it is possible that the daily stressors in his life reduced his ability to think clearly. When coupled with his potentially serious dive situation, this led to an elevated state of panic.

Is Some Anxiety Normal?

It's normal to have low levels of anxiety, and many people experience this feeling from time to time. However, high levels of anxiety can be dangerous, and this



condition should be addressed by your doctor before you dive.

Be Honest with Yourself

A recreational diver should learn to recognize stress and understand the

difference between mild stress that can heighten awareness and elevated levels of stress that can reduce decision-making ability and trigger panic. Certain medications, conditions and existing psychological factors can raise a diver's anxiety level. Divers who are in this higher-risk category should take more time to mentally prepare before getting into the water, or consult a doctor if necessary. Be honest with yourself, and don't initiate a dive that you aren't ready for — either mentally or physically.

Elevated Stress-Level Warning Signs

» Rapid breathing or hyperventilation

- » Irritability or distractibility
- » Imaginary equipment problems
- » Stalling, e.g., taking too long to gear up or enter the water
- » Being overly talkative or becoming withdrawn
- » Muscle tension
- » Wild-eyed look or avoiding eye contact
- » "Escape to the surface" behavior

Be Responsible

Each diver shares responsibility for his or her conduct and for the outcome of the dive. It's important to recognize when you or another diver in the group are experiencing signs of high stress that may compromise the safety of the dive. When in doubt, call off the dive. It's always OK to say no. Learn more about anxiety at dan.org/Medical/Anxiety.

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Over the years, we've worked hard to make scuba diving a safer sport through improved training, education and research. However, dive accidents can still happen and may require costly emergency transportation and treatment. DAN's Dive Accident Insurance lets you dive with confidence knowing that you are covered in case of an unexpected incident. Dive smarter and explore the benefits of DAN Dive Accident Insurance today.

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Your Dive Safety Association

SIX CELEBS, ONE CAUSE

How these stars give back to our oceans

BY BROOKE MORTON



« LEONARDO DICAPRIO

When Leonardo DiCaprio speaks, 20 million people listen. Such is the power of his voice on social media: He founded his charity, the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, to give away millions — including \$3 million to Oceana — and to inform fans about earth-saving causes, such as ending overfishing and establishing marine reserves. leonardodicaprio.com



« SHANNEN DOHERTY

This past September, Doherty teamed up with Sea Shepherd Conservation Society to return to Taiji, Japan, the setting of the documentary *The Cove*, where she aided in live-streaming the dolphin hunt and slaughter. Says Doherty, "The suffering continues for those who are taken from the ocean and imprisoned for captivity." seashepherd.org

SAM SIMON »

When the co-creator of *The Simpsons* learned of his terminal-cancer diagnosis, he began bequeathing his fortune, including the tens of millions per year from show royalties, to charities. In addition to programs that rescue shelter dogs, the benefactor paid for the M/V *Sam Simon*, now part of the Sea Shepherd Fleet. samsimonfoundation.com



COBIE SMULDERS »

The *How I Met Your Mother* star visited Belize with Oceana this past August, as did Rashida Jones and Angela Kinsey of *The Office*. Smulders, a diver and ocean lover, filmed a PSA in the South Water Caye Marine Reserve to educate viewers on the importance of preserving coral-reef habitats, saying, "We can turn things around." oceana.org



« TED DANSON

The *CSI* star helped found American Oceans Campaign which, in 2002, merged with Oceana; the star still serves on Oceana's board of directors. Danson is vocal about overfishing. "A third of what the world catches is thrown away dead or dying because it's not the fish that they were after," he says of current fishermen practices. oceana.org



« JACK JOHNSON

The longtime Surfrider Foundation supporter has created and funded a few charities of his own, including All At Once, which supports plastic-free initiatives. He donated all the profits of his 2008 concert tour charity, and used his 2010 tour to educate fans about ways to help prevent the ocean from becoming plastic soup. surfrider.org, allatonce.org

Taking a Stand

The B-52's co-founder Kate Pierson includes a sea turtle anthem on her debut solo album, *Guitars and Microphones*

BY PATRICIA WUEST



If sea turtles could sing and dance, they might just bop along to the B-52's founding member Kate Pierson's solo song "Bring Your Arms." Penned by Chris Braide and "Chandelier" singer Sia, the record's executive producer, the song is the result of Pierson and Sia witnessing a sea turtle rescue in Mexico. Pierson and Sia watched people wrapping their arms around turtle eggs and moving them to safety. After releasing the solo track and video, the singer tweeted: "@THEKATEPIERSON stands up for sea turtles in 'Bring Your Arms.'"

The video might be a bit cheesy (a fact that makes it even better) — it superimposes the red-haired singer with turtles and fish — but what's not silly is the message. Pierson's upbeat vocals implore listeners: "Bring some help/bring your arms" before the hatchlings-to-be end up "cut and carved."

Guitars and Microphones was released in February, and a portion of album sales will be donated to the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society.

Fishing Tracker Targets Trouble

Who's the world's newest defender against illegal fishing? That would be you, with Google's help

BY MARY FRANCES EMMONS



Around the globe, countries with precious marine-life resources are enacting protections of their seas, but conservation dreams run head-on into reality when it comes to enforcement — many nations lack the resources to police illegal fishing over tens of thousands of square miles of open water.

But what if the average diver could help identify threats to those resources from his or her desktop?

That's the idea behind a prototype technology called Global Fishing Watch, developed by Google, working with Oceana and mapping company Sky-Truth. Using satellite data and tracking devices already present on large boats, the technology isolates fishing boats based on recognizable patterns of movement and behavior. Online, users will be able to view where the tracked boats are operating at any given time.

While Global Fishing Watch can't stop illegal fishing, it can make clearer where and when it is taking place, helping governments and conservation agencies decide where to put resources.

"Illegal fishing is something that we can hope to put a dent in with Global Fishing Watch," Jackie Savitz, Oceana's vice president for U.S. oceans, told the *The Wall Street Journal*. "What is cool is the technology does most of the work."

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A WATERY GRAVE

Robots recover lost heroes from World War II

BY TARA BRADLEY

It is estimated that one month of the two-month-long World War II fight for Peleliu, in the Palau island chain, resulted in more than 5,000 casualties, and 30 U.S. carriers, aircraft and landing craft going missing.

Armed with information from

national archives, ocean-current charts, plane-trajectory analyses and veterans, the Project Recover team uses robots in its efforts to recover the 70 to 80 soldiers who may still be among the wreckage.

Also on-hand to search the ocean floor for the missing wreckage and capture images: autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs), thermal cameras, unmanned aerial systems and sonar.

"Some of these aircraft hit the water [at] around 150 mph, so some of them don't look like airplanes anymore," says Mark Moline, director of the School of Marine Science and Policy at the University of Delaware. "They look very similar to coral reefs."

So how do the AUVs work?

When sonar hits metal instead of reef, it responds with a different density. The AUV then maps out the area with high-resolution images. Once the map

is complete, divers are sent down with hand-held sonar devices to undertake a more thorough search.

To date, two wrecks have been discovered: a WWII Avenger bomber and an F6F Hellcat. Once found, the wrecks are treated with the utmost respect.

"We were approaching what is hallowed ground," says Eric Terrill, a researcher at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography who works with Project Recover. "Two of our guys are still on board that aircraft."

After the discovery is confirmed, Project Recover notifies the U.S. Navy, which informs the families and establishes proper recovery tactics, if necessary. The team is committed to finding the wrecks, but the reward is bittersweet.

"The only thing worse than going off to participate in a war is going off to participate in a war and never getting to come home," Casey Doyle, a volunteer who works with the project, said in a video produced by camera maker GoPro, one of the project's sponsors.

Find out more about the ongoing project at scripps.ucsd.edu/projects/projectrecover.



Backyard Bonanza

Rare snaggletooth shark skeleton found in Maryland

BY RACHEL STUART

"We were just in awe because we had never seen anything like this," says Dr. Stephen Godfrey, curator of paleontology at the Calvert Marine Museum in Solomons, Maryland.

Godfrey is referring to a remarkable find by the Gibson family in Chesapeake Beach, Maryland: a snaggletooth shark skeleton in their backyard.

After a call from the family, Godfrey and assistant curator John Nance traveled to Calvert County

to confirm the prehistoric fossil's identity.

Digging through the sandy sediment – which dates back 15 million years to the Miocene Epoch – the scientists realized the vertebrae were adjacent to one another, lying in a lifelike position. Files – individual rows – of teeth were still intact, overlapping one another in multiple rows, and about 60 vertebrae leading up to the skull were found, although the hip and tail region are missing.

The fossil measures about 2½ feet long.

"This is the only skeleton of a shark that we have from along Calvert Cliffs, and it's the only articulated skeleton that's ever been found of this kind of shark," Godfrey says. "It has given us a new perspective, and a lot of new information, on these extinct snaggletooth sharks."

The snaggletooth shark was known for its extremely serrated teeth; it reached lengths of up to 16 feet. It became extinct during the Oligocene Epoch, which ended around 23 million years ago.

"The fossil shark is just one little piece of information that helps us paint



this clearer picture of what prehistoric life was like – and that, of course, is what our goal is: to decipher the history of life here on Earth," Godfrey says.

The skeleton is currently in the collections room of the museum, but it will soon be displayed in the position that it was originally found.

An unusual find in a Maryland backyard; exploring a Corsair found in Palau in 2013 (above left).

CRITTER HUNT

Silver Kings

Tarpon off Bonaire are rulers of their realm

BY NED AND ANNA DELOACH



We had calm conditions for blenny hunting among the shore rocks lining Bonaire's coastal road. Finding cagey little fishes hiding in a thousand shadowy hiding holes is tricky business.

Twenty minutes into the dive I see three huge tarpon, all measuring more than 5 feet, parade past. It's obvious they are onto something, so I follow them to the ghost-white remains of two wahoo. Larger fishes — permit, palometa and bonefish by the dozens — swirl around the perimeter. But the kings of the party are the big silver tarpon.

The late-morning buffet comes compliments of a fisherman who cleans his daily catch on the back of his dinghy.

Tarpon thrive in Bonaire for a number of reasons. For starters, the large fish evolved to inhabit calm shore waters using modified air bladders to process gulps of surface air when oxygen is low. The local tarpon have learned to supplement their diets with handouts, and lately, feed after sunset using the lights of night divers to target prey. But without question, their greatest survival advantage lies in the fact that they are not good table fare.

NED DELOACH, OPPOSITE, FROM LEFT: MARK MOLINE/ UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE; S. GODFREY/COURTESY CALVERT MARINE MUSEUM

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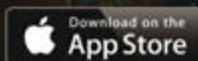
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YOUR FIRST GEAR

You've just gotten your shiny new C-card, and you're ready to fill up that gear bag. But with all the regs, computers and BCs out there to choose from, which are right for you? Here are some suggestions for gear selections we're confident you won't regret.

BY ROGER ROY
PHOTOS BY JON WHITTLE

COMPUTERS



Choosing Your Computer

Console computers are the largest and easiest to read, wristwatches the most compact, and wrist mounts strike a balance of readability and wearable size.

1 OCEANIC PRO PLUS 3

Any diver would appreciate the readability of the 2.5-inch screen on the Pro Plus 3 – and not just for the size but also for the logical way information is presented. The two-button navigation is simple, making it easy to choose selections. Advanced features include three-gas mixes and two algorithm options. **CONTACT:** oceanicworldwide.com **MSRP:** \$679.95 (\$829.95 with compass and quick-disconnect hose)

2 CRESSI GIOTTO

With a screen nearly 2 inches in diameter, the Giotto has room for large characters that make it simple to read. The three-button navigation is straightforward, with other features that include two-gas switching, and a selection of audio and visual alarms. **CONTACT:** cressiusa.com **MSRP:** \$399.95

3 SCUBAPRO CHROMIS

With its stainless bezel and razor-sharp characters (inspired by Japanese swords), this compact style epitomizes what has popularized wristwatch computers. Despite its size, the four-button control is easy to navigate (accessible even with thick gloves). Nitrox-capable, it comes in several colors, including a gold-tone bezel. **CONTACT:** scubapro.com **MSRP:** \$549 (\$539 in gold/black)

REGULATORS

SportDiver

EDITOR'S PICK

2015

Choosing Your Reg

The right reg for you provides the comfort and performance you want, as well as features like hose-routing options, a rotating turret or cold-water applicability.



SCUBAPRO MK21/S560

The second stage is easy on your jaw, and the Venturi switch and breathing adjustment block free-flows and fine-tune breathing resistance. While it's midpriced, this is a reg that can deliver exceptional performance even well beyond recreational depths and breathing demands. **CONTACT:** scubapro.com **MSRP:** \$519



IST SPORTS R860

A 60-degree swiveling turret on the first stage provides options for hose routing; the second has an oversize Venturi switch and a breathing adjustment. An environmental kit for use in cold water is also available. In breathing-machine tests, the R860 showed excellent performance to maximum recreational depth limits. **CONTACT:** istsports.com **MSRP:** \$430



SHERWOOD SCUBA SR²

With a well-deserved reputation as an easy breather, the first stage has five intermediate-pressure ports and a swiveling turret so you can select the best hose routing. The single adjustment knob controls both the Venturi and breathing resistance to keep things simple and compact. **CONTACT:** sherwoodscuba.com **MSRP:** \$736

BCs



Choosing Your BC

Conventional wisdom says jackets offer surface stability, while back-buoyancy models provide an easy swim profile – but the real difference now is more personal preference than performance.

1 CRESSI AQUARIDE BLUE PRO

The classic jacket style was refined with three dump valves, cargo pockets, more D-rings, and a carry handle. The front is streamlined with an integrated-weight system (capacity 20 pounds); trim pockets (capacity 8 pounds) are on the back. **CONTACT:** cressiusa.com **MSRP:** \$479

2 ZEAGLE RESORT

Zeagle's new weight-integrated jacket BC holds a total of 20 pounds and has an adjustable harness. There's also room to store accessories with expandable utility pockets and six D-rings. **CONTACT:** zeagle.com **MSRP:** \$324.95

3 SHERWOOD SCUBA VENTURA

Weighing less than 5 pounds, the updated Ventura is a natural for travel use. The integrated weights load into removable pockets. Other features include an adjustable sternum strap, three exhaust valves, and attachment loops on the harness. **CONTACT:** sherwoodscuba.com **MSRP:** \$470

A man with long blonde hair, wearing a dark t-shirt with 'GRAIN' on it, striped shorts, and a cap, stands next to a teal and white vintage truck. He is holding a surfboard vertically and a surfboard fin. The truck is parked on a dirt path in a tropical setting with palm trees and a sunset sky. The truck's headlights are on, and its driver-side door is open. A surfboard is leaning against the back of the truck.

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Dive Life



NEWS, EVENTS & ADVICE FROM THE PADI DIVING SOCIETY

SD
04/15

One Big, Happy Family

One family's been to eight Kids Sea Camps, the other just two. Together, they share insights on what makes Kids Sea Camp weeks bigger (and more fun) than just the individual families who attend

BY DAVID ESPINOSA

It's as if a family of nine isn't big enough for Joe and Carol Danks. Every year since 2007, they've traveled to Kids Sea Camp with two sons, two daughters-in-law and three granddaughters in tow; and yet, on the very first morning of the very first day, they're greeting adult campers with big smiles and hugs for the little ones.

Kids Sea Camp is a family reunion everyone in the Danks family can look forward to, and not just because the family members — who live in Pennsylvania, California and Maryland — get to see one another. "Parents who are bringing their kids to Kids Sea Camp have a lot of the same attitudes and values we do," says Grandpa Joe. "I enjoy getting to meet them and seeing them at future camps."

Their trip in 2014, to PADI's Buddy Dive Resort Bonaire, was the Danks family's eighth consecutive Kids Sea Camp (and third in Bonaire), and while the family-friendly aspect is one reason, it's certainly not the only one. "[Kids Sea Camp] is a safe, fun learning environment for the children," says Grandma Carol. "The adults can go dive together, the kids go dive together, and we come together at night as a family. It's a win-win."



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The Danks family has been to eight Kids Sea Camps, where there's plenty of in-water instruction, a Junior Open Water graduation dive, and giant ocean strides.

surface or an aquarium."

Ayden Danks (age 11): "It feels like flying underwater, and I like breathing underwater; it's magical."

Q: With a family your size, you can bring the party with you

anywhere. What keeps you coming back to Kids Sea Camp?

Joe: "Keeping the grandkids interested and occupied. If we went off on our own, what would we do with these teenage divers all day? They wouldn't want to do what we do. They're much better when there are activities involved, and at some point they'll be joining us more."

Kiera Harrell-Danks (age 11): "If we went somewhere else, there'd just be a lot of grown-ups who'd be annoyed because there were kids there."

David Danks: "The entire resort becomes kid focused. Some resorts might be 'kid tolerant,' but at Kids Sea Camp, they're kid focused, which makes it a lot more fun for the whole family."

I sat down with the Kids Sea Camp "lifers," and my own two-time Kids Sea Camp family, to find out what they love about scuba diving and Bonaire, and what makes Kids Sea Camp such an unforgettable week.

Q: Why did/do you want to be a scuba diver?

Ella Lin Espinosa (age 6): "I want to scuba dive with my dad."

Chloe Mei Espinosa (age 8): "I want to see all the different animals underwater, like garibaldi (in her home state of California), sharks and dolphins."

Maia Danks (age 14): "It's not an opportunity many people have, and it's cool to see the animals instead of from the



FROM TOP: COURTESY JOE DANKS; MARGO PEYTON/KIDS SEA CAMP (2). OPPOSITE: MARGO PEYTON/KIDS SEA CAMP

Get Your Kid Ready for Diving

There's more to it than just counting candles on the birthday cake

BY PATRICIA WUEST

Scuba diving with your child is a wonderful experience that can create memories to last a lifetime. But how do you know whether he or she is ready?

1 Card him or her.

All certifying agencies offer an adult open-water certification at age 15, and a junior open-water card at age 10, which usually requires the child to dive with a certified adult. There are also introductory experiences starting at age 8, such as PADI's Bubblemaker program.

2 Be honest.

Does your child have the strength and coordination for scuba diving? Will your child pay attention to the training and follow the safety rules? If your child isn't quite coordinated yet or isn't disciplined or focused in other educational settings, wait a bit longer.

3 Keep it fun.

Remember the ultimate goal: for your child to enjoy sharing a sport you love. Offer plenty of praise and leave the training to qualified instructors.

4 Get the right stuff.

It's important to get gear that fits your child. Ill-fitting gear that is uncomfortable and hard to use will make learning difficult – and possibly dangerous.

5 Consider an alternative.

Don't push a child into diving if he or she isn't ready to take that first giant stride – they should be as interested in the underwater realm as you are. Start with snorkeling, and let him or her set the pace to make the experience fun.



Sharon Danks: “It’s a way for the parents to be able to dive, get in the water and know the kids are well taken care of and having a good time, having experiences they couldn’t get elsewhere.”

Q: You’ve been to Bonaire more than once for Kids Sea Camp; what do you love so much about this destination?

David D.: “The diving is wonderful, there’s variety in terms of what you see, and the instruction here [at Buddy Dive] is phenomenal. The instructors understand you can’t teach kids the same way you teach adults, and they do a wonderful job of adjusting.”

Joe: “Very healthy reefs, healthy fish life, but no pelagics or muck dives. We like the lifestyle here on the island. Fifteen thousand people, no stop signs or stoplights; the atmosphere is so laid-back.”

Q: Finish this sentence: The thing I love most about Kids Sea Camp is _____.

Mara Harrell: “When David and Mark get together, it’s like they’re 12 again.”

Mark Danks: “The lack of stress. The

Deena Williamson dives with her daughters Lauren and Megan on the Friday family dive. **OPPOSITE:** The author’s family takes a break for a portrait.

environment that [Kids Sea Camp and Family Dive Adventures’ founder and owner] Margo Peyton has created, the schedule, means I don’t have to worry about what my kids are going to do tomorrow. I can truly have a vacation.”

Q: What is your favorite Kids Sea Camp memory?

Carol: “It doesn’t matter if they were in SASY, Seal, Adventure Diver – I don’t even know if I can remember a time when the grandchildren weren’t excited to tell us what they’d done that day.”

Alison Yap: “Seeing Chloe Mei scuba dive, with confidence, for the first time on the house reef in front of the resort. Not many 8-year-olds get that kind of opportunity, and she loved it.”

Ayden and Maia: “Finally being done with the certifications and getting to dive.”

Chloe Mei: “When I went on a night snorkel with my dad last year in Grand Cayman. We saw a stingray and some huge tarpon.”

Q: What is your favorite memory of Bonaire Kids Sea Camp:

David D.: "It happened yesterday, having Kiera as my buddy on the house reef. That's the first time we got to dive together."

Alison: "Watching David [Espinosa] take Ella Lin on a night snorkel, and one night later taking me on my first night dive. The house reef here was a perfect place for my first night dive ever."

Ella Lin: "When Daddy brought me in the water for a night snorkel. It wasn't scary at all because he was right next to me."

Q: What do you know now that you wish you knew then (on your first KSC)?

David D.: "Be willing to 'embrace the KSC thing.' Margo really knows what she's doing. She's planned things that bring



families together — both within the family, and multiple families together. There are a lot of activities to get kids and families together — be willing to embrace that because it's more than just diving."

Carol: "Kids Sea Camp is tiring; it really is. Especially when the kids are little and

they're so busy."

Joe: "Be prepared that your kids won't want to give it up, and will want to be back next year. Don't do it unless you're prepared to make a multiyear commitment."

Alison: "If you can manage it, arrive a day or two early. It allows you and the kids to get over any jet lag,

and also gets your minds and bodies to relax and get ready for a week of fun. That and you don't want to miss the welcome party!"

Special thanks to Bonaire Tourism, Buddy Dive Resort and Family Dive Adventures.

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CELEBRATE EARTH DAY

The movement to protect the ocean gets stronger and stronger

BY JOANNE MARSTON, MANAGER, PROJECT AWARE FOUNDATION

Every day we receive messages, emails and pictures of the actions divers like you are taking to lead the fight for ocean protection in your local community.

Whether you're involved in Dive Against Debris, taking the AWARE Shark Conservation Diver Specialty or urging increased protection for sharks and rays, your actions and passion inspire us each and every day.

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- » Removed and reported 87,668 items of trash from 58 countries;
- » Influenced listing of 21 sharks and rays at the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species #CMSCoP11;
- » Encouraged CMS Member Nations to make a commitment and advance



international cooperation to tackle the marine-debris crisis;

- » Inspired 25 teams of swimmers to raise \$52,495 to help fight for threatened sharks and rays.

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There are many ways you can be involved in 2015. Organize your own Finathon; learn more about marine debris and how you can help through the Dive Against Debris campaign; and stay tuned for action alerts. Our movement for ocean protection is getting stronger — and we're getting louder.

Want to find a conservation event close to home? Check out the Action Zone link on Project AWARE's website, projectaware.org.

Global Force of Divers

Commit to conservation on Earth Day, April 22

1 Sign Project AWARE's 10 Tips Pledge.

Pledge to protect the ocean every time you dive by following Project AWARE's 10 Tips for Divers to Protect the Ocean Planet.

2 Eat only sustainable seafood.

If you do eat fish, choose species that are harvested in ways that ensure the health of the species and ocean.

3 Be a trash collector.

Make every dive a Dive Against Debris. You can carry a small bag, but even your BC pocket will do.

4 Find greener cleaners.

Use laundry detergents and household cleaners that are safer for you, as well as better for the environment. Avoid using fertilizers and pesticides on your lawn and garden.

COURTESY PROJECT AWARE

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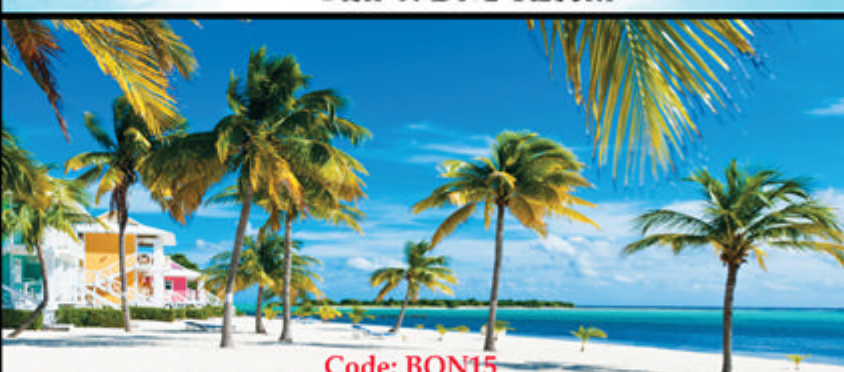
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Images

IMPROVE YOUR UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

OVER/UNDERS

They say a photograph is worth a thousand words, so a split-level image must be worth two thousand

Half-and-half images are some of the most exciting underwater photographs, regularly topping the charts in competitions. They show an impossible view, one we can't actually see with our own eyes and, more important, they transport viewers underwater.

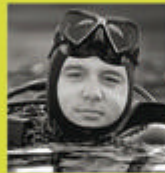
To create a vivid image, you need the right equipment, the right conditions, the right technique and, most often overlooked, the right subject matter. The equipment is relatively simple: Choose your widest lens and biggest dome port. The wider the lens, the more you can show compared with the line formed by the surface. If you don't own a wide lens, shoot verticals to give yourself the widest view. A large dome helps control the movement of the waterline and makes it easier to keep both subjects in focus.

As long as it is sunny, strobes aren't necessary. It's also important to be mindful of timing. The middle of the day offers the most even exposures between the halves. If the sun goes in, the light and colors will go flat, and the underwater half will be much darker.

Lastly, since shallow water is the best place to take over/under shots, there is one final piece of equipment that you're going to need — your snorkel.

Go Strobe-Free

A large, female southern stingray swims in shallow water under storm clouds at Grand Cayman's Stingray City. A snorkeler dives below a re-created pirate ship off George Town, Grand Cayman (opposite left). A group of sockeye salmon fight their way upstream as they migrate back to the river of their birth to spawn; above water, the trees of the Adams River show off British Columbia's fall colors (opposite right).



**Text and
Photos
By Alex
Mustard**

Alex Mustard is a marine biologist who has been a full-time underwater photographer and author since 2004. To view more of his work, visit amustard.com.





Critical Conditions

A successful split needs reasonably calm water to allow the photographer to manage the surface on the dome. Prime time for shooting over/under shots is when the sun is out and high in the sky. High sun ensures the maximum light penetration into the water and similar exposures on both parts. Setting the exposure will require compromise because the above-water subject matter will be always be slightly brighter than underwater. I slightly overexpose over-water and underexpose beneath the surface, knowing I can fine-tune later. It is often hard to judge exposure on the LCD in bright conditions, so be sure to double-check the image's histogram.

A low sun can be used for more dramatic lighting, incorporating silhouetted scenes above the water and/or beautiful sunsets. A low sun does beg for the use of strobes to light up the underwater section. Concerning positioning, pull strobes down to 5 and 7 o'clock positions relative to the camera.

OPPOSITE PAGE

CAMERA Nikon D4, Subal housing // **LENS** Sigma 15mm fisheye // **STROBES** none
// **SETTINGS** f/20, 1/160, ISO 320 // **LOCATION** Stingray City, Grand Cayman

ABOVE LEFT

CAMERA Nikon D4, Subal housing // **LENS** Nikon 16mm fisheye // **STROBES** none
// **SETTINGS** f/18, 1/125, ISO 500 // **LOCATION** George Town, Grand Cayman

ABOVE RIGHT

CAMERA Nikon D700, Subal housing // **LENS** Sigma 15mm fisheye // **STROBES** none
// **SETTINGS** f/18, 1/100, ISO 640 // **LOCATION** Adams River, British Columbia

Complete Focus

Over/under shots tell the story of two worlds, and therefore both need to be in focus for the whole image to be successful. The correct technique is to always focus on the underwater subject, and then close the lens aperture (to a higher f-stop), which gives us the extra depth of field to record the above-water section sharply. All the photos on this page were taken between f/16 and f/22.

It is important to focus accurately; for these types of shots I prefer the precision of thumb focus: a setting where the autofocus does not activate when you press the shutter, only when you push a button on the camera and housing under the right thumb. If you focus above the water,

the underwater scene will almost always be blurred — this is one of the most common mistakes in this type of image.

Subject Selection

The final ingredient for success is a winning composition. Over/under shots require subject matter on both sides of the divide, ideally with the two telling the same story. The fall colors of the trees above the salmon tell us about the habitat, that fish have migrated in to spawn, and the time of year. The best shots have a reason for showing the two worlds, and that has to go beyond the photographer wanting to try out the technique. Think about the story you want to share, and convey it through a strong composition.

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to iOS & Android devices



Permanently sealed with
no doors or O-rings



(above) Camera back features large
"Piano Keys" for easy underwater use

(below) Micro HD with optional
Flex-Connect Micro Tray and powerful
Sea Dragon 2000 Lumen Light

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WorldMags.net



#MYSEALIFEPIC BROUGHT TO YOU BY [SEALIFE-CAMERAS.COM](http://sealife-cameras.com)

RESCUE AT SEA

Shooting at the surface while saving distressed sargassum fish



CAMERA SeaLife DC1400 // **STROBES** SeaDragon Flash // **SETTINGS** f/7.9, 1/233, ISO100 // **LOCATION** Dauin, Philippines // **CONDITIONS** Sunny, small waves, and strong current with temps in the low 80s

#MYSEALIFEPIC

We found five sargassum fish that had washed up on the shore, so we swam them out a few hundred yards where they'd be safe. I took this shot right after the release. — Photo by Daniel Geary, Atmosphere Resorts

PRO TIP

"Calm conditions aren't only ideal for over/unders; a smooth surface is also perfect for reflections." — Alex Mustard

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SPRING BREAK GETAWAYS

BY BROOKE MORTON

If you think a spring-break dive trip is a one-size-fits-all bikinis-and-red-Solo-cups holiday, it's time to explore your options. Sure, some spring-break hot spots are popular for their lively revelries, but others offer easygoing escapes. Whether your goal is about getting down, getting together with family, or getting away, we've got a destination that's perfect for you.





KEY LARGO, FLORIDA

You're Coming for the Night Life

When you're single and fun-loving, the appeal of the ultraremote dive locale bursting with you-haven't-been-here-yet bragging rights fades quickly come happy hour — namely the moment when you raise a cold one with the resort's salty expat owner and no one else. It's a myth that fish-packed reefs and singles-packed beach bars are mutually exclusive holiday finds. You just need the right airport codes.

Mexico's international beach town of Playa del Carmen, located about an hour south of Cancun by car, the Bahamas' capital city of Nassau on the island of New Providence, and Thailand's backpacker island hub Koh Lanta keep the party going round the clock. Post-dive, you can have a Dos Equis, Kalik or Singha or two, provided you're smart about timing. (Just because you have dive insurance doesn't mean you want to try a pick-up line on a chamber technician.)

Gabriel Uribesalgo Croda, owner of Tank-Ha Dive Center in Playa del Carmen, says spring is his favorite season because "it's a little bit crazy here." To keep partying in check, Croda stresses the importance of hatching a game plan before indulging in your first cocktail of the day.

"Our dives finish at 12 p.m., then you can go to the beach clubs in the afternoon," says Croda. The Tank-Ha shop is on Fifth Avenue, the town's main thoroughfare. Bars right on the water, like Wah Wah Beach Bar or Zenzi, start shaking cocktails around 10 a.m., closing at 2 a.m. Around six in the evening, the pace slows for dinner service with dishes like ceviche and tuna tostadas.

Nightclubs, like Coco Bongo and Mandala, keep music pumping until 6 a.m. But those planning to join the morning dive boat will need to exercise discretion, calling it early. After all, you've come to see sites like Turtle Reef, home to loggerhead, Kemp's ridley and green sea turtles. If the night proves too much fun, either delay diving until the afternoon or spend the day on the beach. It's vacation: Don't risk an injury.

Nassau is another on-the-beach city where you'll need to make smart choices given the amount of diving and partying to choose from. Underwater, Caribbean reef sharks and purpose-sunk wrecks prove the biggest attractions, and as we went to press, island operator Stuart Cove's Dive Bahamas planned sinking three brand-new vessels — a 200-foot tanker and two tugboats — in prime shark waters.

PLAYA DEL CARMEN, MEXICO • NASSAU, BAHAMAS • KOH LANTA, THAILAND



As for what to do after you've hung up the wetsuit for the day, Cove recommends chatting to his dive staff — or asking to tag along.

"A lot of our instructors are in their 20s and 30s, and they know the clubs pretty good," he says. "They can guide you in the right direction."

Count on spring-break crowds on Nassau thanks to low on-island costs. The flights are the most expensive piece of the dive-vacation puzzle. Cheap accommodations can be found easily in the Long Wharf area. Plus, Stuart Cove's Dive Bahamas offers deep discounts on diving during this season.

"If you have a student ID, you get 20 to 30 percent off," Cove says.

Travelers richer in time than money might want to try Thailand, one of the world's most affordable places to dive. At PADI IDC Scubafish, the two-day Scuba Diver course costs \$330, which attracts Australian, Japanese and European twentysomethings looking to take advantage of the wildly favorable exchange rates. Deals like this persuade many backpackers to stay indefinitely — and thus the international party atmosphere stays thriving. Come night, tiki torches light a bar-lined beach where rugs have been laid across the sand, inviting visitors to lounge with a cocktail, a dish of pad Thai, and one another.

tankha.com; stuartcove.com; scubafish.com

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: KADU PINHEIRO; ANJA TRENKLE/ALAMY; MARK STRICKLAND; SHAWN RENIER



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A Caribbean reef shark in the Bahamas; nightly entertainment in Playa del Carmen; some of the local color – on a long-nose filefish – in Thailand; and dinner alfresco in Playa del Carmen.

Deco Day (and Night) Trips

Playa del Carmen
Mexico Xplor Adventure Park stays open at night for an experience called **Xplor Fuego**, when special lighting lets you zip-line, swim, or raft through an underground river and drive amphibious vehicles through the jungle long after sunset. xplor.travel

Nassau, Bahamas
On a Wednesday night, take a taxi over to **Arawak Cay** for a cold Kalik beer, some live Junkanoo bands and street-side shacks hawking made-to-order ceviche. "It's a great place to mix with locals and other visitors alike," says Stuart Cove. bahamas.com

Koh Lanta, Thailand
Join **Time for Lime** for a Thai cooking lesson. Return home knowing the tricks behind a killer Panang curry, lime-coconut soup and more. Note that the teaching menu changes daily. Proceeds benefit an on-island animal shelter. timeforlime.net

Your Nights **Belong to the Kids**

If you're a parent, you've heard these words: "But I want" That's why, when planning a family dive vacation, it's all about options: The best destinations are those offering tons of activities on and under the water, plus on dry land. Of course, it helps to avoid places with raging night life and hotels with 2 a.m. hallway parades.

Says Pat Miller, shop manager at Dive Maui, of his island, "The sidewalks clear out by 10 p.m. because everybody is getting ready for the next day outside." It's a place where friends and families bond over playing on the beach, hiking, surfing, zip lining, and engaging with local culture and history.

As for what to expect underwater, Miller says, "We don't do extreme." Dive Maui's boats provide down lines with underwater buoys, making descents easier for those without ocean-diving experience. One of Miller's favorite shore dives is the Mala Boat Ramp. At this former pineapple-cannery big-ship pier, the depth averages 30 feet. "You can sight whitetip sharks, eagle rays, a good amount of morays, and all our Hawaiian fish."

The endemic fish tend to captivate all mainlanders — and if your junior divers or snorkelers need a nudge,

Miller recommends investing in a laminated ID card illustrating the Hawaiian endemics.

Another tip when planning a family vacation, says Dan Dawson, owner of Horizon Divers in Key Largo, is to remember that you've come to spend time together. He suggests divers book only a couple of days on the boat prior to arrival, not a full week.

"It's like going to your favorite restaurant," says Dawson. "Your appetite is bigger than your stomach."

He says some divers aren't ready physically for so much repetitive diving and can get worn out. "Start with just a day or two, then adjust."

Groups can also plan to spend time together, even if some members don't hold certification cards yet.

It's a place where friends and families bond over playing on the beach, hiking, surfing, zip lining, and engaging with local culture and history.



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: BENJA IGLESIS; GREG LECOEUR; AURORA PHOTOS/ALAMY; JOSE ALEJANDRO ALVAREZ



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Christ of the Abyss greets Key Largo divers; Xunantunich ruins in Belize; Hol Chan Marine Reserve in Ambergris Caye, Belize; snorkeling off the Maui coast.



Deco Day (and Night) Trips

Maui, Hawaii

Learn the art of outrigger paddling — small children are welcome — with a scenic canoe trip around the island, granting spectacular views of the Makena coastline, **Haleakala summit** and famed Molokini Crater. hawaiianpaddle sports.com

Key Largo, Florida

Rent a kayak or paddle board for an hour (or day) from Paddle the Florida Keys in **Tavernier**, a community on Key Largo, then paddle yourself through a warren of mangrove tunnels, or take a guided two-hour eco-tour. paddlethefloridakeys.com

Cayo District, Belize

Plan a day trip to visit Mayan ruins on the mainland. Caracol is more challenging to reach due to road conditions, but it is the newest discovery. **Xunantunich**, west of Belize City, is an easier journey and has more on-site facilities.

“If mom and dad dive, and the kids want to do Discover Scuba Diving, aka DSD, to try the sport, then they are all on the boat in the afternoon,” says Dawson, adding that the minimum age for DSD is 10.

Overall, Key Largo works well as a destination for a family of divers — or divers and snorkelers — because most sites are shallow, within 25 to 45 feet.

One of the best parts about diving the sites off Ambergris Caye, Belize, is that travel times to the reef are only five to 10 minutes from the island’s dive shops.

Dive boats depart from the island around 9 a.m. and return between dives so you can relax for an hour. Family waiting for you? You can usually make two dives by 1 p.m. So if your loved ones aren’t certified, you can still spend the afternoons together, kayaking, paddle boarding or lounging beach-side.

Ambergris Caye is also a good jumping-off point for day trips: Groups can head to the Belize mainland to explore Mayan ruins, go cave tubing, or venture farther offshore to dive Turneffe or Lighthouse atolls.

goscubadivemaui.com; horizondivers.com; ecologicdivers.com



You'd Trade a Loud Nightclub for a Quiet Nightcap

The word “nightclub” is polarizing. There comes a milestone along the path to a certain kind of maturity when the mention of one makes you crave the sanctuary of bed — ideally one where you hear waves lapping ashore and perhaps a few tree frogs. If this describes you — regardless of age — there are several destinations where, come spring, life moves at a pace that allows for enjoying the small things.

Take Fiji. Nobody goes to Fiji for the night life. They go for beach-side bungalows straddling turquoise water, and jungle-covered hillsides and reefs where soft corals fight for real estate.

“Spring is the tail end of our quiet season — there aren’t as many people around, so service is more personalized,” says Sally Cooper, director of events for Fiji Tourism.

Underwater, the soft-coral capital of the world isn’t without big thrills, and spring is prime time for a few occurrences.

“Bull sharks are coming back after mating and giving birth through Fiji summer — your winter,” says Cooper, of Beqa, a satellite island to the main landmass, Viti Levu.

In the Yasawa Island chain off the northwest side of Viti Levu, Manta Ray Island Resort sees its namesake pelagic winging in late March through September. Big animals aside, this island nation is also known for sheer walls where hot pink, orange and white soft corals provide curtains for troupes of anthias and fusiliers.

If you spend *les vacances de printemps* in French Polynesia, a country of atolls and islands east of Fiji that’s legendary for over-water bungalows, you’ll find waters teeming with sharks — nearly every island offers a different predator experience. Off Tahiti proper, you can drift dive sites such as the White Valley, where you’ll likely encounter blacktips, lemon and gray sharks.

The bigger thrill is pass diving, found on islands including Fakarava, Rangiroa and Moorea. It’s not your quad muscles that power you along this dive, but rather a changing tide. While it carries you, it also whisks

Everyone likes to have a couple of drinks while watching the sunset, and then they’re done — it’s time for sleep.

FIJI • TAHITI • ROATAN, BAY ISLANDS, HONDURAS

fish into the maws of dolphins, sharks, shoals of big-eye jacks, and any other nearby opportunists.

Like Fiji, in Tahiti, you get your kicks during the day, then content yourself with stargazing, conversation and perhaps a nightcap come day’s end.

Same with Roatan, one of the Honduras Bay Islands. There’s some action in the town of West End, but even the bands and small crowds call it a night by 10 p.m., says Pasquale Paonessa, owner of Las Rocas Resort.

It’s mainly a one-sport island, with most dive boats casting off close to sunrise. According to the island’s Franko map, there are 174 named sites spanning every coast. It’s no wonder most travelers come to spend daylight swimming alongside turtles and green moray eels.

“The busiest hour for night life here is around 6 p.m.,” says Paonessa. “Everyone likes to have a couple of drinks while watching the sunset, and then they’re done — it’s time for sleep.”

fiji.travel; topdive.com; lasrocasresort.com

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: DAVID FLEETHAM; DARRYL LENIUK; GREG LECOEUR





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A spectacular sunset on Moorea Lagoon in Fiji; a slender filefish in Honduras; schooling anthias nearly obscure a diver in Fiji.

Pack These for Your Spring Fling

Cut down on weight but not features with these three travel-ready items



Sherwood Scuba Ventura

Although it weighs just under 5 pounds, this well-made BC doesn't skimp on features. And you'll love how compactly it fits in your luggage.

sherwoodscuba.com
MSRP: \$470



Cressi Tahiti

If your destination is a warm-water locale, you'll save on space by packing this 3 mm shorty, which is available in both men's and women's sizes.

cressiusa.com
MSRP: \$119.95



Akona Collapsing Duffel

This bag serves dual purposes – while you're traveling, it's a padded regulator bag; at your destination, it's a duffel that will hold all your gear.

akona.com
MSRP: \$58

Deco Day (and Night) Trips

Fiji

The main island of Viti Levu has mountains and rivers – and therefore rafting. Join Rivers Fiji for a day trip of the **Class III Upper Navua River**, or a one- or two-day trip of the **Class II Luva River**. Trips are suitable for veterans and rafting novices. riversfiji.com

Tahiti

Spend a day or several on the quiet island of Tahaa. At the **Champon pearl farm**, you'll be shown the underwater crop, and how it's harvested. Boat transfers can be arranged from Raiatea, part of the Society Islands. champonperles.com

Roatan, Honduras

Earth Mama's Garden Cafe, found in the town of **West End**, offers twice-daily yoga classes during the week, plus healthy pre-sesh fuel like banana cream oatmeal, and energy-blend smoothies with bee pollen and ginseng. earthmamasroatan.com

CAYMAN



SCOTT JOHNSON/SEASCAPESIMAGES.COM

Family Diver
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New Diver
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Returning Diver
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Tec Diver
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Guerrilla Diver
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ISLANDS

FIVE WAYS

Divers coming to the Cayman Islands are as varied as the tropical fish on the islands' reefs.

Whether you're traveling with your family, looking for a tec experience, hoping to blow bubbles 24/7, coming as a new diver or returning as an old salt, you'll find what you're looking for in the Cayman Islands.



FAMILY DIVER

A Cayman Islands



CLOCKWISE: Grand Cayman's Stingray City, yellow tube sponges on a Little Cayman reef; blue-striped grunts schooling in Grand Cayman.

DON'T MISS

Plan a fun-filled vacation your family will remember for a lifetime



Bat Cave, Cayman Brac

No, not *that* Bat Cave, but a fun excursion, especially at night when the bats are active.

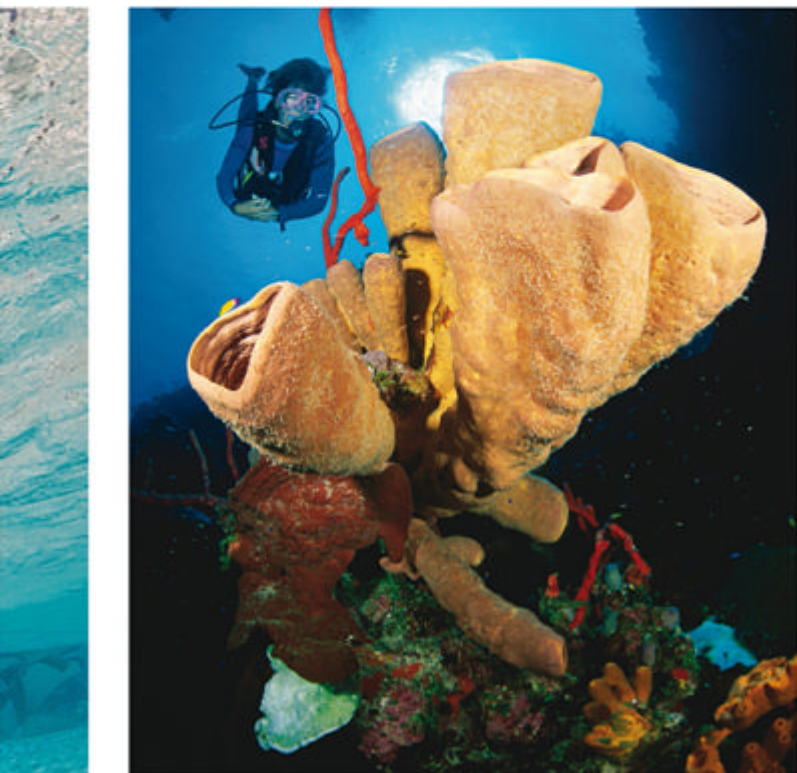


Rum Point, Grand Cayman

Kids frolic in the water, while grown-ups can dig their toes in the sand and unwind.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ELLEN CUYLAERTS; GETTY IMAGES/LOVELY PLANET IMAGES; ALEX MUSTARD

vacation has something for everyone – from the littlest snorkeler to grown-up divers



My two daughters love everything we adults do in a vacation destination: white-sand beaches, bathtub-warm water and shallow, colorful reefs. So when it came time to plan our first family-friendly dive trip, the choice was simple: a Kids Sea Camp trip to the Cayman Islands.

“The Cayman Islands is perfect for families because there’s something for everyone and for every age of diver,” says Margo Peyton, owner of Family Dive Adventures, which has run Kids Sea Camp weeks on Grand Cayman for the past 12 years. “There are shallow reefs for snorkelers, wrecks, DPV dives, and wall dives, and Junior Open Water divers can explore the *Kittiwake*.”

Indeed, Grand Cayman and its sister islands, Little Cayman and Cayman Brac, are perfect for families, bathed as they are by calm waters year-round. Many reefs are shallow enough for an 8-year-old on her first PADI Bubblemaker dive, or a 6-year-old snorkeler biding her time until she can follow suit.

For dive-addicted adults, sites like Grand Cayman’s ex-USS *Kittiwake*, Devil’s Grotto and Babylon offer a taste of the island’s world-class diving. Of course Grand Cayman’s most famous site is one the whole family can enjoy together. Hand-feeding dozens of stingrays 10 feet down at Stingray City, while snorkelers watch a few feet above, is one of those adventures they’ll never forget.

Like Grand Cayman, most of the diving off Little Cayman and Cayman Brac is suitable for everyone. Sites like Tombstone, Treasure Trove and Lynn’s Reef off Cayman Brac are shallow enough for long, easy dives; a little more challenging, the *Capt. Keith Tibbetts* wreck is a can’t-miss dive. And while Little Cayman’s vertiginous Bloody Bay Wall might not seem ideal for new divers, the Great Wall section of this famous stretch of reef is perfect – shallow on top and home to friendly grouper.

Best of all, since there’s so much variety, choosing next year’s spot will be the easiest decision of your life.

By David Espinosa

SIDEBAR, FROM LEFT: GETTY IMAGES/
ISTOCKPHOTO (3); ZACH STOVALL;
CAYMAN ISLANDS DOT



Stand-Up Paddle Boarding
Get an upper-body workout: Rent boards on Grand Cayman’s Seven Mile Beach.



Turtle Farm, Grand Cayman
It’s an actual working farm that contributes to the conservation of the islands’ turtles.



Salt Rock Nature Trails, Little Cayman
Encounter endemic tropical birds, iguanas and butterflies while hiking.

NEW DIVER

Grand Cayman and its sister

After finally graduating from the pool to open water, I'll never forget that first real "underwater breath." I was just out of college and Grand Cayman-bound — so long, swimming pool. Little did I know I was trading one pool for another, with Cayman's barely-there current, 100-plus-foot viz and temps hovering at a steady 78 degrees. And that's just on Grand Cayman. Once there, you won't get far without hearing veteran divers speak of the sister islands, Little Cayman and Cayman Brac, beloved for similar conditions and an even more-remote feel. My only concern was trying to fit all of them into one trip.

The islands are known for spectacular walls, and topping the bucket list is Little Cayman's Bloody Bay Wall. Favorite sites like Lea Lea's Lookout, the Meadows and Blacktip Boulevard offer newer divers the rush of a wall without intimidating conditions or depths. With some walls starting at 60 feet or shallower, new divers can check out the wall while the more-experienced divers can explore the Volkswagen-size caverns and sunlit swim-throughs found at deeper depths.

Similar to her sisters, Cayman Brac has walls with swim-throughs that seem big enough to park a Mack truck. Sites like Public Beach and Sergeant Major Wall showcase opal-colored hogfish, massive lobsters and vibrant yellow tube sponges.

For new divers, there's more to these three sisters than their walls. On Grand Cayman, sites like Aquarium and Tarpon Alley teem with life, including schools of slow-moving tarpon. Babylon and Sunset Reef are shore dives with easy-to-navigate coral heads. And first-time wreck divers will love Grand Cayman's *Kittiwake* and Cayman Brac's *Tibbetts*.

Trying to fit all three sister islands into one trip might seem overly ambitious, but dedicated newbies, like I once was, will be rewarded with a dive trip that is sure to fuel their passion for the sport.

By Tara Bradley



CLOCKWISE: Grand Cayman's *Doc Poulson*; Sunset Reef's *Amphitrite* mermaid; a resident turtle.

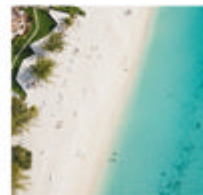
DON'T MISS

First time in the islands? You'll fall in love with everything about them.



Wreck Bar & Grill, Grand Cayman

The mudslide, a potent mix of vodka, Kahlua and Bailey's, was invented here. 'Nuff said.



West Bay Beach, Grand Cayman

Here's where folks watched the *Kittiwake* sink; get great BBQ cooked right on the beach.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GETTY IMAGES/WATERFRAME; ELLEN CUYLAERTS; CHARO GERTRUDIX/ULTIMA FRONTERA

islands provide a perfect welcome for a diver's first trip to paradise



SIDEBAR, FROM LEFT, ZACH STOVALL
(2); HEMIS/ALAMY; WILL BURRARD-
LUCAS; CAYMAN ISLANDS DOT



Owen Island, Little Cayman

Rent a kayak and pack a lunch – and paddle out in South Hole Sound to find an islet paradise.



Parrot Reserve, Cayman Brac

It's worth the early wake-up call: Hikers can enjoy excellent bird-watching.



Mastic Trail, Grand Cayman

Find rare plants while following a winding path through a mangrove swamp.

RETURNING DIVER

Once you visit the Cayman Islands, you'll want to come back again — and again

My first dive in the Cayman Islands was as memorable as my first kiss: Grand Cayman's Bonnie's Arch, a coral formation with an ample swim-through that was nearly obscured by a massive school of silvery tarpon. The tarpon encounters are no longer as reliable as they once were, but this North Wall site, an easy 150-yard kick from famed Orange Canyon, is a lovely photo op. I was hooked.

"The diving is better than anywhere in the Caribbean," says Keith Sahm, general manager of Sunset House on Grand Cayman. Sahm might be partial, but the islands' lucky geology — "We are the top of an underwater mountain chain (the Cayman Ridge)," says Sahm — has contributed to the diving's overall excellence. "There are no industries or run-off from a hilly topography," says Sahm. The result is "sheer, exhilarating walls in gin-clear waters."



FROM LEFT:
Cayman Brac's
Capt. Keith
Tibbetts wreck;
Grand Cayman's
Devil's Grotto.

Sahm's praise for the islands is echoed by Jason Belport, general manager of Brac Reef Beach Resort and Little Cayman Beach Resort located on Grand Cayman's sister islands: "The islands have long been viewed as the capital of the diving world."

In fact, divers have been flocking here ever since dive-industry pioneers started putting cruise-ship passengers on Grand Cayman's reefs in the 1950s. Since then, some of the dive sites have become legendary, such as Bloody Bay Wall and Orange Canyon. But Sahm has another favorite: "I think the Grand Cayman dive everyone should make is Stingray City. I have seen quite a few folks actually moved by their experience with the rays, and they were skeptical before they went."

As for the sister islands, Belport has his choice picks too. "The Chutes (West, Middle and East) on Cayman Brac offer tremendous color — beautiful deepwater sea fans and wrasses, angelfish, grouper, turtles, and just about every type of hamlet," he says. "Mixing Bowl is at the center of the Bloody Bay Marine Park off Little Cayman, and is home to schools of horse-eye jacks and chubs, as well as several resident Nassau grouper."

As for me? My favorites include the islands' wrecks — the *Kittiwake* and *Tibbetts* — as well as Grand Cayman's Devil's Grotto, especially in late summer when the swim-throughs are packed with silversides and tarpon. Shafts of sunlight sifting through the reef's cracks and openings make this mazelike site especially nice for underwater photographers.

I've had countless dives in the Caribbean, but I'll always remember my first dive on Bonnie's Arch. Like my first kiss, the memory of that magical experience keeps me coming back to the Cayman Islands.

By Patricia Wuest

DON'T MISS

The islands continue to surprise — even divers who are repeat visitors.



Point O' Sand Beach, Little Cayman

Kick off your flip-flops, turn off your cell, and curl up with a good book.



Westerly Ponds, Cayman Brac

Lovely wetlands with spectacular bird-watching — more than 100 species nest here.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SCOTT JOHNSON/SEASCAPESIMAGES.COM; ALEX MUSTARD, SIDEBAR, FROM LEFT: KAREN AND IAN STEWART/ALAMY; CAYMAN ISLANDS DOT; GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO; CAYMAN ISLANDS DOT; ZACH STOVALL

Divers Guide to Cayman Islands

**Average
water temp:**
83 degrees F

**What to
wear:**
3 mm wetsuit
or shorty

Average viz:
100 feet

When to go:
Year-round;
high season
is November
to May

**For more
information,**
go to
[sportdiver.
com/cayman
islands](http://sportdiver.com/cayman-islands).



Bar Jack, Grand Cayman

A casual al fresco restaurant that offers divine piña coladas and sunset views.



Parasailing, Grand Cayman

Look for turtles on the reef as you glide over the Caribbean off Seven Mile Beach.



Smith's Barcadere, Grand Cayman

Located near George Town, you can shop after beach-bumming.

TEC DIVER

Ready to try technical diving?

Peering over the edge of Grand Cayman's North Wall inspires equal parts terror and awe. But as I fly my rebreather down the vertical seascape, fear turns to wonder at the colorful mural of sponges, corals and bright tropical fish. The suboceanic terrain surrounding Grand Cayman offers divers who want to go deep an endless playground of out-of-bounds adventure. But it's the experienced operators supporting mixed-gas and rebreather diving who make the destination such a haven for the technical tribe — not to mention the local crew of passionate tec divers and instructors who are willing to share their secrets (well, some of them).

Eons ago, when the submerged walls around the islands were exposed sea cliffs, Mother Nature created chimneys, chutes and tunnels that now make for seriously exciting diving. Sites such as Funky Town, Nancy's Chute, Dan's Donut and Elephant Ear are world-class deep dives pioneered by resident tec enthusiasts. Two Grand Cayman wrecks are popular with tec divers: *Kittiwake*, a training ground for wannabe wreck divers, and the more-advanced *Carrie Lee*, which teeters on the edge of a cliff at 260 feet. Cayman Brac's *Tibbetts* can also be penetrated by certified wreck divers.

For many tec divers, the real attraction is Grand Cayman's fabled sponge belt, which circles the island between 200 and 300 feet. Gigantism runs amok in this zone, creating massive barrel, elephant ear, and other sponges, thanks to prime growing conditions and very little human interference.

"There is a lip at approximately 200 feet where the main wall tends to just fall away and open up a whole new world," says Steve Tippetts, senior instructor at Divetech. "My favorite depth is between 200 and 260 feet, where some of the sponges look big enough to climb inside, and the colors in this region are just spellbinding, with lots of reds and iridescent blue coral features."

By Eric Michael



DON'T MISS

We're betting you like your downtime a bit edgier. We've got options.



Spelunking, Cayman Brac

There are several caves to explore; Peter's Cave is mammoth, with several tunnels.



Hungry Iguana, Little Cayman

Live music, conch chowder and tropical drinks are the hallmark of this LC institution.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ALEX MUSTARD; ELLEN CUYLAERTS

You'll find perfect opportunities to challenge yourself in the Cayman Islands



FROM LEFT: Grand Cayman's *Kittiwake*; Lighthouse Point's Guardian of the Reef statue.

SAFEGUARDING ITS REEFS EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR

How do the islands love their reefs? Let us count the ways.

When the *Kittiwake* was put down off Grand Cayman's Seven Mile Beach in 2011, it joined an impressive slate of Cayman Island dive sites. It also added to the islands' ambitious Dive 365 project. Launched in 2008, Dive 365 increased the number of moored dive sites in the Cayman Islands from 297 to 365 – a site for every day of the year. The new sites were identified by reaching out to divemasters and asking where they got wet on their days off. It was a fun project with a serious mission: Dive sites would be closed temporarily, on a rotating basis, so popular reefs could recover from diver pressure. The first new site to be moored was Victoria's Secret, a shallow 35-foot dive on Grand Cayman's west side. And the last? In November 2012, a mooring ball was added to the final site: Broadbelt's Bommie, a pinnacle located in Grand Cayman's South Sound area.

"It is an example of not only our commitment to providing new and challenging experiences to the dive community, but also our dedication to sustaining the environment," said Shomari Scott, who at the time was the Cayman Islands Department of Tourism director.

A more recent example of the islands' conservation efforts is the restoration project to repair the devastating damage caused when a cruise ship dragged its anchor across a dive site in 2014. The undertaking is supported by volunteer divers, local dive operators and the Department of Environment.

For more information, visit divecayman.ky.



SIDEBAR, FROM LEFT: CAYMAN ISLANDS DOT; JACK KENNARD/FLICKR; CAYMAN ISLANDS DOT (2); COURTESY TIKI BEACH



Kitesurfing, Grand Cayman

There are several places, including West Bay where you can catch some serious air.



Lighthouse Trail, Cayman Brac

A three-hour hike will get you to Peter's Outlook, and panoramic views of Spot Bay.



Tiki Beach, Grand Cayman

The private beachfront cabanas are the perfect place to sip a cocktail and watch the sun set.

GUERRILLA DIVER

If you're a diver who cares far more about diving than about glorious beaches or family-friendly turtle farms, someone who just wants to dive-dive-dive, then the live-aboard approach to the Cayman Islands is for you.

There's only one, but it's one of the best: *Cayman Aggressor IV*. You'll get a fantastic taste of what Grand Cayman and its sisters have to offer — three islands, 16 sites and 25 dives sound good? — including quality time on some of the most famous sites in the region.

Take *Kittiwake*. You'd be hard-pressed to find a new artificial reef with better reviews than this 251-foot vessel off Grand Cayman's Seven Mile Beach. It's been an instant hit with divers, but because you're on a live-aboard, you'll have the luxury of multiple, relatively private dives here, plus the chance to explore the gorgeous nearby reef. *Cayman Aggressor's* Capt. Lauren Hill confesses that she actually likes the reef even more than the wreck — it's that good. I soon see why when I dive there: Fantastic formations rise 40 to 50 feet from the sand, draped with sponges and whip corals, and pocked with openings onto long, lovely vistas.

Serious metal heads will also relish the only divable Russian destroyer in the Western world, off Cayman Brac. The *Capt. Keith Tibbetts* isn't for the faint of heart, but penetrating both halves of this 330-foot frigate is well worth it for the adrenaline rush.

Prefer natural attractions? Little Cayman is an unspoiled underwater paradise that offers something for all levels of divers, often within a single dive. A good example is the Meadows, along Bloody Bay Wall, a favorite of Aggressor Fleet CEO Wayne B. Brown. "It's like three different dive sites in one," he says, from the famous wall to a broad sandy plain on top to a shallow coral maze under the yacht, where you'll find delicate nudis, curious reef sharks and turtles galore, all seemingly with no fear of divers in this protected slice of underwater heaven.

By Mary Frances Emmons



DON'T MISS

Even dive-til-you-drop divers have to come up for surface intervals.



Kaibo Beach Bar & Grill, Grand Cayman

Get here by water taxi, then order a rum mojito and all-you-can-eat BBQ.



Scooter Rentals, Little Cayman

What better way to explore an island where iguanas have the right of way?

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: CHARO GERTRUDIX/ULTIMA FRONTERA; ALEX MUSTARD; JENNIFER PENNER

Cayman Aggressor IV is one way to see all that these three islands offer

CLOCKWISE:
The *Kittiwake*; a scrawled filefish at Bonnie's Arch on Grand Cayman; the reeftop on Little Cayman's Bloody Bay Wall.

SIDEBAR, FROM LEFT: CAYMAN ISLANDS DOT; GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO; CAYMAN ISLANDS DOT (2); ZACH STOVALL



Windsurfing, Grand Cayman

If you're experienced, try jamming in the main channel near Barkers in West Bay.



The Topsy Turtle Pub, Cayman Brac

The alfresco bar serves excellent pub grub like a portobello-and-Swiss cheeseburger.



Georgetown, Grand Cayman

Achieve shopping nirvana on Cardinal Avenue: T-shirts, trinkets, rum and jewelry.



AN UNDERWATER AMAZON

The current-fueled waters of Komodo National Park teem with life, and some say this magical place — the heart of the Coral Triangle — shelters more species than the entire Caribbean

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY GREGORY LECOEUR

Clockwise from top left: A camouflaged candy crab; a shy clownfish; a tiny pygmy seahorse; harlequin shrimp on its meal of choice, the sea star; a colorful nudibranch; the flashy fluorecence of a tubastraea coral.

Drifting along the wall, our bubbles defy the laws of physics and plunge into the abyss. The multicolor clouds of fish are agitated in every direction. The coral reef scrolls under our masks like a dramatic kaleidoscope mixed with an architectural design of hard and soft corals. Large predators such as whitetips, jack fish, giant trevally and dogtooth tuna emerge from the blue, and take advantage of their hydrodynamic features to hunt and check the perimeters.

We hover with the realization that we are immersed in the Komodo National Park, the heart of the Coral Triangle.

Listed as a World Heritage and Biosphere Reserve, this relatively small region hosts an extraordinary biodiversity renowned for its plethora of endemic species both above and below the surface.

Shotgun (also known as Cauldron) is no exception. The passage between the islands

creates a very fast current — up to 10 knots — so adrenaline is guaranteed.

The remarkable beauty here is due to the happy collision of the Pacific Ocean's warm waters with the Indian Ocean's upwelling of cold waters, rich in plankton and nutrients. The combination of currents creates a high level of nutrition and oxygenation, which results in an abundance of life and healthy corals and reefs.

While these strong currents can be a challenge for divers, this unique ecosystem offers the perfect opportunity to observe Indonesia's many iconic species. On this trip, we spotted everything from tiny pygmy seahorses to giant Pacific manta rays, but most mesmerizing of all were the behaviors of each of these different species. Our favorite: the candy crab's ability to stay safe by craftily camouflaging itself in its home of soft coral.

Divers Days Off:

Whether you decide to explore Komodo National Park via liveaboard or with a land-based dive operator, the area offers many ways to discover its colorful culture and vast array of wildlife.

Villages on Stilts

Some of the islands within the park are populated by sea gypsies who welcome visitors to their villages built on stilts.



Beaches of Many Colors

Over 70 islands boast loads of perfect tropical beaches, most of them completely deserted. Coming in shades of white, yellow and pink, even the sands here are colorful.

Flying Foxes?

KNP is home to a number of raptors like kites or eagles, as well as an endemic species of cockatoo. Not birds,

but another flying attraction are the flying foxes, the world's largest bat species, which roost in the mangroves and take off at dusk to feed on fruit from the larger islands.

Walking Adventures

From gentle five-minute climbs to tough multi-day treks into the savannah and monsoon forest, there are countless options, depending on your fitness level.

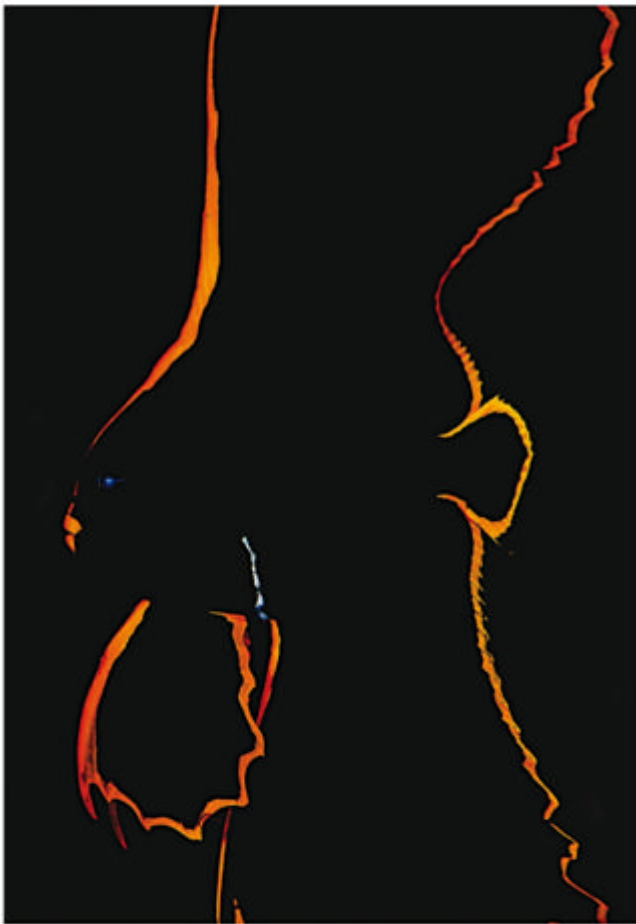
Where Giant Lizards Roam

A trip here wouldn't be complete without paying a visit to the world's largest lizard. Although the iconic Komodo dragons are excellent swimmers, they are not found anywhere else. Thermoregulation limits their distribution because their internal temperature cools when they come in contact with water.

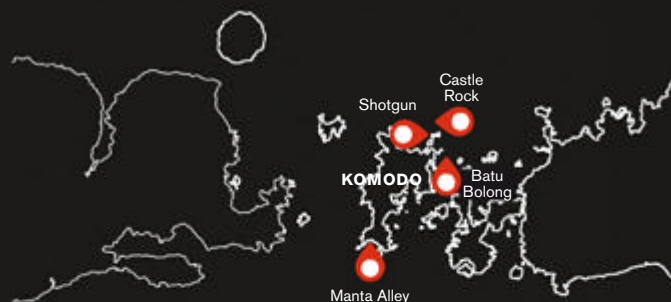




Clockwise from left: Crinoids, including the hard body, attract few predators, making them a great place to find smaller critters; a school of sweetlips; a lazy blenny proves to be a willing model.



Clockwise from top left: Night dives are the best time to spot sea pens and their symbiotic relationships with crabs and shrimp; yellow tubastraea are also called sun corals; the beloved face of the hard-to-spot frogfish; a juvenile batfish imitates a leaf in order to help it escape predators.



When to go:

Year-round, especially during the dry season (April to December); rainy season is January to March.

North of the park:

The water is warm and clear, hard and soft corals are rich and colorful. Tropical marine life – such as anthias, angel-fish and reef sharks – is abundant.

Average water temp: 80 to 81°F **What to wear:** 3 mm wetsuit

Average viz: 65 to 100 feet **Depth:** 15 to 130 feet

South of the park:

The water is cooler and planktonic, the invertebrate life is amazing, and the plankton attract larger filter feeders such as manta rays.

Average water temp: 73 to 75°F **What to wear:** 5 mm wetsuit

Average viz: 32 to 65 feet **Depth:** 15 to 100 feet

Don't Miss Dives

Manta Alley

As the name suggests, this site is certainly the best place to see manta rays. On a good day, more than 20 animals visit the different cleaning stations around this tiny Island.

Castle Rock

Subject to strong currents, this site offers stellar viz – all the better to see a huge variety of marine life, from tiny nudibranchs to schools of sweetlips and whitetip sharks.

Batu Bolong

This small rock is best visited around slack tide when you'll find an abundance of vibrant corals with large fish patrolling along the walls.

Shotgun, or Cauldron

Because the water here can really hum, this site is advanced. The reward: an explosion of marine life. It's also a good place to spot giant manta rays.





Clockwise from far left: The Komodo archipelago is also home to its highly revered giant dragon; Manta Alley reef is popular for sightings of *M. birostris*; the rays frequent the area for regular cleanings; traveling schools of bumphead parrotfish eat the reefs and then excrete them into sand.

Red Fish, Blue Fish?

Komodo is a wonderland of fish and coral species – learn what they are during PADI's Underwater Naturalist Adventure course. padi.com

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Photo pros share their secrets for getting
perfect pics in 10 iconic settings

BY BROOKE MORTON

The hammerheads
of Bimini

BRANDON COLE. OPPOSITE: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

1

BIMINI, BAHAMAS

"For frequency, Santa Cruz is hard to beat," says Chris Callahan. The manager of the Santa Barbara-based dive shop Truth Aquatics has just been asked which of the Channel Islands delivers the best odds for sea lion and harbor seal encounters. The area is also home to some of the country's most stunning underwater scenery: Like fairy-tale beanstalks, the ropes of kelp climb 80, sometimes 100 feet, to the surface — and on a clear day, nothing's more magical than watching these curtains part, revealing a bright orange garibaldi, bat nose ray or leopard shark.

truthaquatics.com



2

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS, ECUADOR

"It's all about the big," says shooter Tanya G. Burnett of this Ecuador outpost. From hammerheads and whale sharks to mantas and sea lions, the Galapagos are a wide-angle buffet. To take it all in, Burnett recommends keeping your breathing as regular as possible, even if melon-headed whales pass by, as happened on her recent trip. She also says it's best to set your ISO to 400 at a minimum. "You're dealing with volcanic rock, which is much darker than the Caribbean's white sand, so you want to make your settings more sensitive; when things swim by, you'll have more light to play with." Burnett sets her focus to infinity to increase the odds of capturing in-focus subjects. Beyond that, be ready for anything. "I've had my eyes on whale sharks when a school of tuna passes suddenly."

aggressor.com

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3

CHUUK, MICRONESIA

"Everyone thinks Truk is all about the deep, but there are amazing opportunities to shoot shallow wrecks and atop deeper ones," says Brandon Cole of World War II mecca Chuuk Lagoon. He advises that shooters first create a shot wish list. Upon arrival, talk with the divemasters to learn how to capture these opportunities. "*Shinkoku Maru* on the outside is stunning," he says. "The deck guns are covered in soft corals, so you can challenge yourself to portray this as a weapon or just a coral garden." He also stresses being realistic: Some photo ops are iconic but not necessarily within reach for all divers, such as the so-called R2D2 of the *Fujikawa Maru*, deep within the wreck. Instead, Cole suggests contenting yourself with the wealth of more-accessible subject matter.

trukodyssey.com



BRANDON COLE. OPPOSITE: ALEX MUSTARD

Picture Perfect

Just getting started in underwater photography? We've got some gear suggestions.

SeaLife Micro HD

This is a completely sealed, ultracompact underwater camera that has no doors or openings to leak. The Micro HD shoots 13-megapixel stills and 1080p HD video with a built-in 140-degree fisheye lens and 16 GB onboard memory. **CONTACT:** sealife-cameras.com **MSRP:** \$399.95; \$499.95 Micro HD+ (32GB +WiFi)



Backscatter Flex Filter

Taking video with a GoPro? Backscatter's Flex is a press-on filter for easy color correction underwater. It comes with a dive filter for either blue water or green water. **CONTACT:** backscatter.com **MSRP:** \$29

Ikelite Vega Video + Photo Light

With three power levels, a rear rotary switch with an LED indicator and a 65-degree beam, the Vega serves any photo, video or dive-light need.

CONTACT: ikelite.com
MSRP: \$550



4

PHILIPPINES

With more than 7,000 islands, it's no wonder the Philippines tends to overwhelm photographers looking for their next travel target. "I always tell everyone that the diving there delivers incredibly well — you can't go too far wrong," says photographer Alex Mustard. "You could argue there is nowhere better for macro," he says. "So much so that people tend to forget that the reefs are so healthy and incredibly good for wide-angle." When asked to list his favorite Philippine subjects, he mentions thresher sharks, turtles, and whale sharks in the wild, plus those attracted to the fishing nets — so you're guaranteed encounters with these filter feeders. Plus, the country has a handful of shipwrecks. "It's got everything you could want." turtlebaydiveresort.com



5

CAYMAN ISLANDS

"Because Grand Cayman is so established, people tend to forget how much cool stuff is there," says Alex Mustard, who offers image-making training courses here twice a year. "Diving is most productive when you have abundant subject matter that's reliably there," he says. "And Cayman has turtles and stingrays as reliable subjects, plus the *Kittiwake*, which we call the Wreck of a Thousand Faces — it's just the right size to shoot from so many angles." Cayman Brac and Little Cayman also offer plentiful subjects, from stunning vistas on Bloody Bay Wall to the wreck of the *Capt. Keith Tibbetts*. "Every dive produces good images," Mustard says. "The people who think it's too ordinary always leave bowled over."

sportdiver.com/cayman-islands

World's Best Dives



6

RAJA AMPAT, INDONESIA

"My favorite wide-angle dive site in Indonesia is Arborek Jetty," says Debbie Arriaga, photographer and cruise director for the liveaboard vessel *Arenui*, which regularly visits the spot. During the day, she sets her camera focus wide to include everything from the local children hamming for her camera to wobbling sharks sleeping under coral heads. After dusk, she switches to a smaller lens. "It's easy to make a two-hour dive there, watching the sun set and the orange light coming through the soft corals." As for macro, the jetty's finds include blue-ringed octopuses, the Lembah sea dragon, toadfish, algae-eating shrimp, juvenile pinnate spadefish, twin-spot signal gobies and much more. Says Arriaga, "So much of this stuff is so special because it's so rare."

thearenui.com

7

VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA

"I took one of my favorite images near a site called Dillon Rock, and a friend liked it so much, he had it tattooed on his arm," says photographer Jason Bradley. The image he captured was a giant Pacific octopus, which approached when Bradley happened to be somewhat far from his buddy. "Its head was the size of two basketballs, and I was afraid — it could have ripped off my mask easily," says Bradley, who stayed with the critter as excitement churned his stomach. "I captured a beautiful portrait, representing a side of the animal that really resonates with me." Bradley also says that overall, Vancouver is a hot spot for endless macro, as well as Steller sea lions. For diversity and abundance of life, he adds, "I think the whole Inside Passage is a terribly underrated dive destination — in fact, it's probably my favorite place in the whole world to shoot."

tourismvancouver.com

DEBBIE ARRIAGA, OPPOSITE: JASON BRADLEY

8

RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO

Of all the cenotes in Mexico's Riviera Maya — the stretch of Caribbean coastline that includes Cancun — Keri Wilk claims Carwash is his favorite. "It's got a forest of lily pads, a small crocodile near the start, turtles all along the perimeter, and dead trees inside that give shots a framing element." Partly because one site can be so subject-rich, and partly because you don't have time to drive to more than one or two cenotes a day, Wilk recommends spending an entire day at one cenote to maximize sunlight angles. "You can go with a simple camera system because you don't need strobes," he says. "The caves have surreal natural lighting that's much like how cathedrals are lit through stained-glass windows."

cavetrainingmexico.com



9

BAJA CALIFORNIA, MEXICO

"I have never been there and not had a sea lion encounter," says Jason Bradley of Los Islotes, a dive site 30 miles north of La Paz, Mexico. This rocky site is a colony of hundreds of California sea lions, and it's open to divers of all experience levels. "Shooting animals is a numbers game, but at a site like this, you know you have the numbers, so you'll definitely hit a jackpot — the photography lines up every time."

funbaja.com

10

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Tanya G. Burnett's favorite subject in Papua New Guinea happens to share her name: A seamount in Milne Bay called Tanya's Reef. "I remember it being so extraordinary, covered in tables of coral with thousands and thousands of chromis moving as sheets," Burnett says. She shot one of her all-time favorite images here using her widest lens, getting as close to the reef as possible without making contact. Then came patience. "You take that first shot, and the strobes scare the fish, making them scatter — so you freeze and wait for them as they dive down and then slowly rise back up." Says Burnett, "You just keep working that same scene until you think you've got the most it has to offer."

papuaneuguinea.travel/usa

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30. Ikelite

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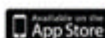
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ENTANGLEMENT SCARE

Poor choices and inexperience get two divers into trouble on a lake dive

BY KARL SHREEVES



INCIDENT REPORT

DIVERS: Elva and Michael, certified together as Open Water Divers, with 12 total dives **SITE:** Man-made reservoir lake **CONDITIONS:** Calm, 8 to 12 feet visibility; 75°F above thermocline at 55 feet, 52° below. Easily disturbed mud bottom; no appreciable water movement.

Elva and Michael had made eight dives in the lake, having reached 60 feet on the previous short dive. With 2,000 psi in their tanks, they planned another dive “a bit deeper.” They swam on the surface to deeper water and descended vertically. They lit small dive lights at 60 feet, where it got dark. As a result of neither monitoring his buoyancy

nor adding air to his BC as necessary, Michael descended more quickly than Elva. Elva watched his light below but continued to descend slowly. At 80 feet, she landed on Michael, who was snarled in the branches of a submerged tree. Silt swirled around them, reducing visibility. A moment of chaos followed as they struggled with finger-thick branches and buoyancy control. With repeated BC air bursts and kicking, Michael finally began to rise. Snapping branches, the pair escaped the tree and ascended, clearly shaken. At about 25 feet, Michael ran out of air. He surfaced with an emergency swimming ascent and inflated his BC orally. Elva surfaced moments later.

WHAT THEY DID WRONG

Elva and Michael were overconfident. They probably lacked the training and experience for the dive. They started a deep dive without full cylinders. Michael didn’t adequately control his buoyancy, and descended at a fast pace. They did not have a descent line to assist in controlling their descent and ascent; a descent line is also useful for making proper safety stops. They lost buddy contact during the descent and ascent.

WHAT THEY DID RIGHT

When the situation became stressful, they focused on solving the problem, restoring buoyancy control and aborted the dive. Michael responded correctly to an out-of-air situation during his ascent.

FIVE TIPS FROM THIS INCIDENT

- 1 **BE REALISTIC** about your training and experience limits.
- 2 **ALTHOUGH NOT ALWAYS NECESSARY,** follow a descent, anchor or mooring line, or the contour, to your planned depth.
- 3 **TAKE THE PADI ADVANCED OPEN WATER DIVER** course to learn about planning and making dives deeper than 60 feet.
- 4 **TO MAKE A CONTROLLED EMERGENCY SWIMMING ASCENT,** keep on all your gear, look up, reach up and swim up, exhaling and making an “ahhhhhh” sound. Drop your weights if you’re not sure you can reach the surface. Maintaining proper buddy contact may eliminate the need to perform a CESA.
- 5 **IF YOU NEED BUOYANCY** and can’t use your BC for any reason, drop your weights.

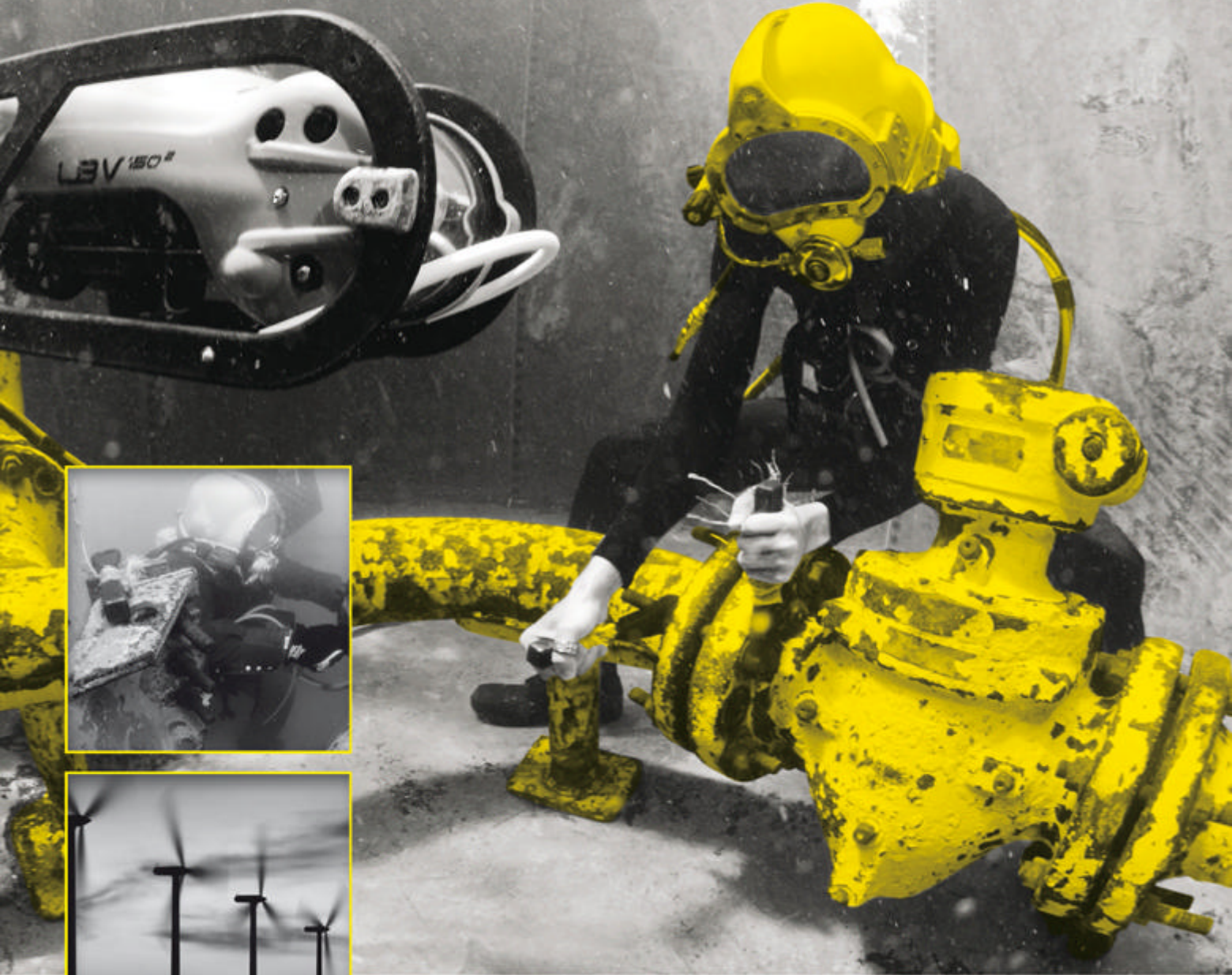
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